

VZCZCXR09091

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DE RUEHBW #0264/01 0791207
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 191207Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0058
INFO RUCNEUD/EUR DTSP0 SITES COLLECTIVE
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 0102

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000264

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PREF PGOV PHUM SR KV

SUBJECT: SERBIA: REFUGEE COORDINATOR WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT: MARCH 10-14, 2008

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TENSE COORDINATION MEETING FOLLOWING ARREST OF SERB IDP IN KOSOVO

¶1. (SBU) On March 14, refcord attended a Danish Refugee Council (DRC) an internally displaced persons (IDP) coordination session in Belgrade. DRC, in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) regularly meets with IDP representatives across Serbia, usually ahead of return-related activities, such as meetings with municipal returns authorities or go-and-see visits (GSVs), to gather first-hand recommendations and insights from IDPs on the return process. Discussions were tense and largely focused on the March 12 detainment of IDP Momcilo Jovanovic on suspicion of war crimes while participating in a DRC GSV in Kosovo. IDPs demanded an explanation for his detainment, fearing they too might be apprehended if they participate in future GSVs. Several IDPs were concerned the arrest was a form of intimidation by Kosovo authorities to discourage Serb returns. UNHCR Senior Protection Officer John Young explained that UNHCR and DRC were closely tracking the Jovanovic case. Young said that UNHCR and DRC were doing everything possible to ensure the safety and rights of those participating in GSVs and planned to resume return activities as quickly as possible. DRC and UNHCR are currently evaluating the vetting process associated with GSVs, which are on hold for the time being.

SERBIAN RED CROSS TO CONTINUE SERVICES IN KOSOVO

¶2. (SBU) On March 14, refcord met with Vesna Milenovic, Secretary General of the Serbian Red Cross to discuss Red Cross

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activity in Kosovo. In a frank discussion, Milenovic reminded refcord how important it was for the GOS to "protect a Kosovo and Metohia that will always be a part of Serbia." Reading from GOS talking points, she said the international community was "trying to take away an integral part" of Serbia. She immediately followed these remarks with an apology for the February 21 attack on the U.S. Embassy. "Violence is unacceptable, though you can imagine that Serbs are angry and upset by what is happening to Kosovo," she said. She told refcord the Serbian Red Cross would continue to provide humanitarian assistance, particularly to Serb enclaves in Kosovo, under the principals of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Milenovic was not confident the Red Cross of Kosova had either the capacity or the will to provide services to all populations in Kosovo. She is planning a visit to Kosovo in April.

NGOs OUTLINE PROGRESS, FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR IDPs IN SERBIA

¶3. (SBU) On March 12, refcord met with representatives of PRM local implementing NGOs to discuss their views on future prospects and solutions for IDPs in Serbia following Kosovo's declaration of independence. Participants included Nada Culjak-Banjac and Goran Basta of the Balkan Center for Migration, Slavica Milunovic of Bozur, Mirko Vukcevic of Solidanost and Vladimir Cucic of War Affected Persons Relief and Protection Committee.

¶4. (SBU) NGO representatives reported an increase in recent weeks for IDP requests for assistance, particularly for income generation activities. Milunovic attributed most of the inquiries to an increase of IDPs who have resolved to remain in Serbia and were looking for opportunities to "make ends meet for their families." Culjak-Banjac said that requests for legal assistance, including regularization of personal documentation, were on the rise both for those IDPs hoping to return to Kosovo (to confirm ownership of property for example) and those who wish to regularize their status in Serbia.

¶5. (SBU) Culjak- Banjac and Basta told refcord that although many IDPs they had met with in recent weeks continued to express a desire to return to Kosovo, most were not prepared to accept the new reality on the ground in Kosovo. "They want to return to their place of origin, but refuse to accept an independent Kosovo." Culjak-Banjac said. Cucic and Vukcevic felt that although the Kosovo Serb communities had thus far responded positively to requests by GOS officials to remain in their homes, their day to day lives would continue to deteriorate so long as they are pressured to demonstrate their loyalty to Serbia. Culjak-Banjac said there would be no change in the near future in GOS policy to continue to promote IDP returns to Kosovo. She hoped however that if democratic forces prevailed in May elections, there would be a "subtle acceptance" of integration-focused programs.

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DCM MEETS WITH IOM

¶6. (SBU) On March 14, DCM met with Gregoire Goodstein, Chief of Mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Serbia. He described IOM programming in Serbia, including helping the Ministry of Defense to support some 1,850 redundant defense personnel transition into the civilian labor market via the NATO PFP Trust Fund, building capacity for GOS bodies who work with refugees and IDPs, and providing technical assistance to Serbian and Croatian border police to enhance cross-border cooperation on anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling.

MUNTER